

Xander Bogaerts on shortstop vs. third base, mindset vs. Max Scherzer, outlook for 2014



ANOTHER FIRST: Xander Bogaerts poses with Dr. Alex Schwengle, Aruba's Minister of Health, after his November induction into the country's newly created Walk of Fame, an offshoot of their Wall of Fame. The Red Sox infielder was the first person to be inducted. (Photo courtesy Aruba Tourism Authority).

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By:

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Even now, **Xander Bogaerts** can't believe it was real.

As we wrote in Sunday's *Herald*, Bogaerts has gotten rock star treatment ever since he returned to Aruba after becoming the island's first World Series champion. More than 1,000 people turned out Nov. 3 at Queen Beatrix International Airport to welcome home the Red Sox' 21-year-old phenom, who was the first inductee to Aruba's new "Walk of Fame." A renovated field down the street from Bogaerts' childhood home was renamed "Xander Bogaerts Ballpark," and with help from his mother, **Sandra Brown**, Bogaerts has started the "Dare to Dream" Foundation to provide financial assistance to Aruba's youth.

"When I got back home, sometimes you think about it, you reflect on it," Bogaerts said. "It's like, 'Wow, this really happened. It's not a dream.'"

A few outtakes that didn't make it into the newspaper article:

If the Red Sox have decided which position Bogaerts will play, they haven't told him.

A natural shortstop, Bogaerts may well put an end to what has been a revolving door at the position since the Sox traded **Nomar Garciaparra** in 2004. But free agent shortstop **Stephen Drew** remains unsigned, and if agent **Scott Boras** is unable to secure a multiyear contract, manager **John Farrell** has been candid about his desire to bring Drew back on a short-term deal. Moreover, Farrell has often discussed how impressive Bogaerts looked at third base in the postseason, even though he didn't have any experience there until last year. Even now, Bogaerts admits he was only comfortable at third base "by the end" of the World Series.

"During the regular season it was still tough, to be honest," he said. "I haven't got a lot of ground balls, a lot of games played there. During the postseason, when I started off on the bench and we got (infielder **John**) **McDonald** in a trade, McDonald and Butter (infield coach **Brian Butterfield**) just kept working on me. That was really, really helpful to me. Also, DiSar (Pawtucket manager **Gary DiSarcina**) when I was at triple-a. Those were the guys that started teaching me. But once McDonald came in, he's such a good defender, he's such a veteran, he was a good guy to learn from. You definitely get better the more reps you take, the more ground balls."

Last week, McDonald signed a minor league contract with the Los Angeles Angels, for whom DiSarcina will work this season as a third base coach. Butterfield remains on Farrell's staff, however, and he has told several people in the organization that he believes Bogaerts can handle being an everyday shortstop in the majors. Of course, if Drew returns, the Sox also trust that Butterfield can continue to help Bogaerts' transition to third base.

"I've got to be prepared," Bogaerts said. "You don't know what's going to happen until it happens. I haven't heard anything at all."

In Game 3 in St. Louis, Bogaerts became the third-youngest player to triple in a World Series, behind only **Ty Cobb** and **Mickey Mantle**. But years from now, we still will be talking about the pair of walks that he drew after falling into two-strike counts against Cy Young Award winner **Max Scherzer** in Game 6 of the ALCS.

"What was going through my mind?" Bogaerts said, repeating the question. "Let me see: Just get a good pitch to hit. Try to get on base so someone can score me in. I was hitting at the bottom of the lineup, so probably you had (**Jacoby**) **Ellsbury** coming up, (**Shane**) **Victorino** and then the 3-4 hitters. So if I got on base, something can happen."

But there's one thing Bogaerts wasn't thinking about.

"At the time I wasn't thinking, 'This is Max Scherzer,'" Bogaerts said. "I was thinking that a few days back. But I definitely wasn't thinking that when I was up there. I felt really locked in against Scherzer. It's the postseason, you know? Everything, really, is like 10 more times as important

than the regular season. You've just got to be really, really focused and locked in so good things can happen. You can just go up there and feel defeated, feel like you can't do it."

There may have been no greater sign of Bogaerts' maturity at the plate, especially when you consider that he walked only once in nearly 100 plate appearances one year earlier in Double A.

As much as Bogaerts is enjoying his stardom, he also knows this is just the beginning.

Called up by the Red Sox in August, he got only 44 at-bats in 18 regular-season games before his breakthrough in the playoffs. He's still considered a rookie and figures to be among the top candidates for AL Rookie of the Year. And so, in between honoring his community engagements and interview requests, his mother has seen to it that he budgets enough time for offseason workouts to prepare for his first full season in the majors.

"In the first press conference that we had, I explicitly told everyone, 'Remember, he's just 21,'" Brown said. "Everyone wants him to be like their celebrity. The whole show around it, that's not so important for us. So, I've had to be kind of like the manager and say, 'No to this, no to this, yes to this, yes to this.' It's time again to settle down and get back into his training. It's enough. He wants everyone to back off a little bit now. He wants to stay focused. The whole celebrity thing they want to do around him, he don't really go into that at the moment. He just wants to concentrate on sports."

In fact, Bogaerts said he plans to report to Fort Myers before the end of January.

"Man, I can't wait," he said. "Baseball is what I love doing. I don't feel like I'm forced to play. I play because i really love the game. I just can't wait to get back, man. I'm just working out really hard and trying to keep my body in shape."

(Twitter: @ScottLauber)

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